



2007

Ski Tests

Partnered with WaterSki, an independent team of testers critiques eight high-end slalom skis

BY JOHN HORTON
PHOTOS BY THOMAS GUSTAFSON

The 2007 Independent Ski Tests team had two lakes, two boats, eight high-end slalom skis and only one mission — to give the skiing masses valuable insight into what ski might perform best under their feet this year. The 12 testers from around the country had their work cut out for them as they began putting the latest and greatest slalom skis through their paces. Recruited by ski-test administrator John Taylor Horton of Carbon Fins, the team

represented a cross section of the skiing world, with members from a wide spectrum of ages, sizes and abilities. The team's basic conclusion was that much like the testers themselves, each ski possessed its own personality and buoy-carving ability. Now, with the strengths and weaknesses of those personalities assessed and the results tallied, the 2007 Independent Ski Tests team can officially declare "mission accomplished."

Methodology

Each skier in the 2007 Independent Ski Tests was randomly assigned skis to ride and evaluate. Testers used their own binding systems to better evaluate the ski's performance. Each ski was tested by six skiers, and testers did not evaluate the ski brand they normally use. Skis were first tested with factory binding and fin settings, but on subsequent rides the skiers were allowed to make changes to best accommodate their ability and style.

The skiers were instructed to rate the skis on a five-point scale in the following six categories: speed, turning, stability, carryout, predictability and overall impression. A score of 3 equals a neutral or acceptable level of performance. A score

of 2 equals below-average performance, and a score of 1 equals extremely low performance. A score of 4 equals above-average performance, and a score of 5 equals extremely high performance.

SPEED: How fast a ski accelerates with a given amount of lean. A fast ski requires less effort and allows a skier to make up lost ground.

TURNING: How well a ski initiates, turns and finishes around each buoy.

STABILITY: How steady the ski feels under the skier, both on edge and riding flat. An unstable ski feels squirrely when ridden flat

and does not give the skier a stable platform in the turn or when on edge.

CARRYOUT: How well a ski maintains speed and angle from the wakes to the ball. A ski with great carryout glides out in front of and wide of the ball.

PREDICTABILITY: Whether the ski reacts to the skier the same way ball after ball and pass after pass. A ski that turns poorly at every ball is predictable, but a ski that sometimes turns hard and other times doesn't is not predictable.

OVERALL IMPRESSION: A measure of how a skier feels about how the ski rides — not a sum of the other criteria.



the testers

Skier Name	Age	Weight	Height	Tournament PB	Boat Speed (MPH)
1 Carly Clifton	22	125	5'6"	3@38 off	34
2 Eric Lee	57	165	5'10"	3.5@35 off	34
3 Jed Blackburn	33	170	6'2"	3@39½ off	36
NOT PICTURED 4 Keith Albritton	52	175	6'	4@39½ off	34
5 Kim McLain	32	120	5'5"	3@32 off	34
6 Mark Montgomery	54	160	5'9"	3.5@38 off	34
7 Mark Schneewind	43	170	5'10"	2@39 off	34
8 Mike Erb	49	190	5'9"	6@32 off	34
9 Nicole Baird	31	140	5'7"	3@35 off	34
10 Stephanie Stange	37	135	5'7"	2.5@38 off	34
11 Tyler Scott	14	130	5'7"	3@38 off	36
11 Ward McLain	36	195	6'2"	4@39½ off	36

CONNELLY F1

Sizes: 65", 66", 67", 68", 70"
Price: \$649.99 (blank)

The Connelly F1 was the big surprise of the 2007 Ski Tests. Slight flex and rocker adjustments to this ski have elevated it from a contender in 2006 to one of the test-team favorites in 2007. The test team rated this ski first in Carryout and second in Stability. One-third of the test team ranked the F1 as their first or second favorite ski overall. This ski will reward a patient skier with a lot of angle and width. Some skiers found it to be occasionally squirrely and unforgiving, but most of the test team found that the F1 rides deep in the water and feels solid underfoot.

scores

SPEED 3.83
TURNING 3.92
STABILITY 4.08
CARRYOUT 4.08
PREDICTABILITY 3.33
OVERALL IMPRESSION 3.92

"It comes around very smooth at the finish and creates a lot of angle." — Stephanie Stange

"This ski has a perfect balance of controlled speed, awesome stability and fast turns." — Kim McLain

"If you are not in great position, this ski is not forgiving." — Mike Erb

"If you get into trouble on this ski, you can make up time easily." — Mark Montgomery



FISCHER #01

Sizes: 1,625 mm (64"), 1,675 mm (66"), 1,725 mm (68")
Price: \$1,305 (blank)

The Fischer #01 was clearly the most anticipated ski at the 2007 Ski Tests, and it totally exceeded the testers' expectations. The #01 delivered stable, predictable and forgiving performance right out of the box, ranking highest in Overall Impression by a significant margin. It also tied for the top spot in the Turning category and ranked second in the Speed category. Fischer makes this ski in three different stiffness models but the test team almost universally preferred the stiffest, known as the Orange. Besides the unexpected on-the-water performance, the flawless carbon-fiber exterior and nearly perfect finish quality of the #01 were also noteworthy.

scores

SPEED 4.42
TURNING 4.08
STABILITY 4.33
CARRYOUT 4.00
PREDICTABILITY 4.17
OVERALL IMPRESSION 4.38

"The Fischer is a very fast ski. It's also smooth and controllable." — Tyler Scott

"A nice balance between speed and stability. It really makes skiing easy." — Nicole Baird

"Rides great in the water, not too high, not too deep." — Jed Blackburn

"The most stable, predictable and forgiving ski in the test." — Mark Montgomery





GOODE 9700

Sizes: 62", 64", 65.5", 66.25", 67", 69"
Price: \$990 (blank)

For the second year in a row, the Goode 9700 ranked highest in the Speed category at the Ski Tests. When you combine that speed with fantastic carryout and turning characteristics, you have a shockingly high-performance slalom ski. Quickness from one side of the course to the other with minimal skier effort is a hallmark of Goode skis, and the 9700 certainly exemplified this trait. Less technical skiers may find this ski somewhat unstable and unpredictable from the apex of the turn to the finish, but for a skier with a calm, technical style, the 9700 performs adequately.

"The 9700 is fast, easy to ride, turns like it's on a rail, and keeps going across course." – Ward McLain

"Great stability and acceleration." – Eric Lee

"It's almost too fast!" – Kim McLain

"It's fast across course and releases easily. Two thumbs up." – Mark Montgomery

scores

SPEED	4.67
TURNING	3.75
STABILITY	3.33
CARRYOUT	4.00
PREDICTABILITY	3.75
OVERALL IMPRESSION	4.13



Skier: Mark Schneewind

GOODE 9800

Sizes: 62", 64.25", 65.75", 66.5", 67.25", 68.5"
Price: \$1,090 (blank)

The 9800 is the latest offering from Goode, and like its predecessors it is much better than good. In the Turning category it tied for first. Skiers will find that this ski offers similar performance to the 9700 but is smoother and more forgiving in the turn. It does not necessarily turn as hard as the 9700 but turns more controllably. Like the 9700, the 9800 seems to require almost no skier effort to get from one side of the course to the other. The testers found that this ski not only generates speed with ease but it also maintains that speed very well.

"It is effortless from buoy to buoy and is very stable." – Carly Clifton

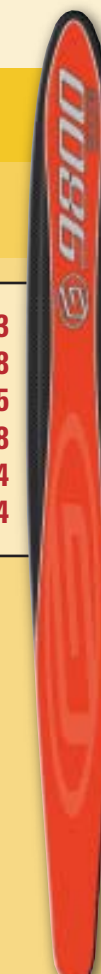
"It is much more symmetrical in the turns than past Goode skis that I have ridden." – Stephanie Stange

"Very little effort to ride this ski. You can make a lot of mistakes and still run a lot of buoys." – Ward McLain

"The ski has lots of speed but also bleeds it off well." – Mark Schneewind

scores

SPEED	4.33
TURNING	4.08
STABILITY	3.75
CARRYOUT	3.88
PREDICTABILITY	3.54
OVERALL IMPRESSION	4.04



HO MONZA

Sizes: 63.5", 65", 66", 67", 68", 69.5"
Price: \$900 (blank)

The 2007 HO Monza has graphics reminiscent of famous European race cars. Keeping with its race-car image, this ski is not only fast across the lake but also quick to change directions. Some members of the test team found this ski to be temperamental and unstable at the apex of the turn because it creates its speed without much physical effort by the skier. If you are in the right position, it not only turns hard but holds on to angle through the wakes very well. The test team found that the fin settings on the Monza were critical for optimizing all aspects of its performance.

"Buoy to buoy it really gets across course quick." – Carly Clifton

"Almost anybody could get on this ski and ride it well." – Keith Albritton

"You can get a lot of angle with this ski." – Tyler Scott

"It is a little squirrely, although I can make up time on it." – Eric Lee

scores

SPEED	3.75
TURNING	3.42
STABILITY	2.83
CARRYOUT	3.08
PREDICTABILITY	2.75
OVERALL IMPRESSION	3.50



O'BRIEN SIXAM 1

Sizes: 67.5", 69"
Price: \$799 (blank)

The O'Brien Sixam 1 is a serious shortline slalom ski that comes without some of the erratic tendencies of the other high-end skis. This ski is smooth and predictable. The test team described it as being comfortable on their first passes and performing better as the rope got shorter. Transitions and edge changes on this ski are flowing and uneventful. Behind this image of calm, the Sixam 1 is a fast ski that easily gains a lot of angle from the ball to the wake and carries that angle out to the next ball line. The testers said the fin clamps on the Sixams are notoriously hard to adjust.

scores

SPEED 3.58
TURNING 3.58
STABILITY 3.50
CARRYOUT 3.17
PREDICTABILITY 3.50
OVERALL IMPRESSION 3.63

"The ski gets good angle out of the ball and stays with that angle through the wakes." – Mark Schneewind

"This ski will do everything you want it to do." – Keith Albritton

"I was very comfortable right away on this ski." – Mike Erb

"It's not effortless but it's solid." – Ward McLain



O'BRIEN SIXAM 2

Sizes: 64.5", 66", 67.5", 69"
Price: \$799 (blank)

The Sixam 2 is a wider and more stable version of the men's world-record-holding Sixam 1. Additional width makes this ski especially stable from the apex to the finish of the turn, and more forgiving than most other skis when it comes to skier error at the ball. It is not the fastest or hardest-turning ski on the market, but it carries out well and creates substantial angle. For a world-class skier with perfect technique, this ski may not be aggressive or fast enough, but for a 34 mph regional- or national-level skier, the Sixam 2 is user-friendly and offers great performance, according to the testers.

scores

SPEED 2.67
TURNING 2.92
STABILITY 3.67
CARRYOUT 3.33
PREDICTABILITY 3.50
OVERALL IMPRESSION 3.42

"I got so wide that I didn't know what to do." – Mike Erb

"I never felt like I was out of control." – Nicole Baird

"It carries out fantastic and finishes smoothly. My favorite of the test." – Stephanie Stange

"Unbelievably stable." – Tyler Scott



RADAR MPD

Sizes: 65", 66", 67", 68"
Price: \$899.99 (blank)

The Radar MPD is a stable, smooth and forgiving ski that is capable of taking its rider to new personal bests. With a big sweet spot, this ski will appeal to a wide variety of skiing styles. Out of the turn it doesn't give the skier a feeling of blinding speed, yet it gets wide and early to the next buoy with surprising ease. On opening passes it doesn't turn or gain angle aggressively, but as the rope gets shorter this ski absolutely comes alive and does both of these things well. The MPD is not for everyone, but among the strong and aggressive skiers on the test team, this ski was a favorite.

scores

SPEED 3.75
TURNING 3.25
STABILITY 3.75
CARRYOUT 3.83
PREDICTABILITY 3.50
OVERALL IMPRESSION 3.46

"You can make mistakes on this ski and get away with them. It gets better as the rope gets shorter." – Keith Albritton

"It stayed on edge behind the boat incredibly well." – Tyler Scott

"Not really fast but very stable." – Jed Blackburn

"The Radar rocks!" – Mark Schneewind



Skier: Kim McLain

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To view all the raw data from the 2007 Independent Ski Tests, visit waterskitests.com.